

SENATE BILL NO. 1
EXHIBIT NO. 5
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BILL NO. SB 166

Statement of

Michael C. Ackley, Member

National Association of Railroad Passengers

Submitted for the record of the

Committee on State Government

Friday, January 23, 2009

SB 166 - Allow Low-Interest Coal Tax Trust Fund Loans to Expand Rail Passenger Service

My name is Michael Ackley, resident of Missoula, MT and a member of the National Association of Railroad Passengers. I would like to thank the committee on State Government for the opportunity to speak in favor of Senate Bill 166. Trains both freight and passenger can help strengthen the economy and improve national security. Rail service consumes significantly less energy per passenger mile than cars, air service and trucks. Passenger service provides increasingly important travel choices for everyone, especially those on limited budgets and decreased mobility, i.e. the elderly, students and families. I have talked with numerous groups of people regarding the possibility of reestablishing passenger rail service through southern Montana and the enthusiasm was overwhelming. Maintaining the Empire Builder along the Highline is essential. In calendar year 2007 the boardings and deboarding on the Empire Builder within Montana was 153,760. That figure for calendar year 2008 increased to 167,455. An increase in ridership of just under 13,700. With climate change, congested roads, unstable gas prices and a national goal to ween ourselves off of foreign oil these figures

are only going to escalate. We need to look for new transportation and energy solutions. An increase in passenger rail infrastructure will create good quality jobs. The state of Montana needs a national network of modern, high quality passenger trains to serve all Americans.

It was a pleasure to share my concerns with the committee on this important issue.

Thank you.

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